

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Slaughter Introduces Bi-Partisan Legislation to Remedy Problems with WHTI**

*Slaughter's PACT Act to Protect and Enhance Travel and Trade with Canada*

**Washington, DC** - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, along with Representatives McHugh (R-NY), Peterson (D-MN), and Manzullo (R-IL), today introduced a bill designed to ensure that WHTI does not unintentionally freeze trade and tourism with Canada.

The legislation is known as the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT Act.□

This legislation has the support of the Travel Industry of America and the US Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Niagara-based Binational Tourism Alliance.

**"This bipartisan bill is a common-sense solution to a critical problem our northern border communities are facing,"** said Rep. Slaughter. **"We won't sit idly by while the local economies of Western New York and beyond are severely damaged by**

ill-conceived proposals like WHTI. The current WHTI proposal will devastate tourism and trade with Canada and we simply cannot afford to let that happen. I feel strongly that my bill is the model that DHS and State should follow, and I am happy to see wide support for this commonsensical legislation."

Highlights of the PACT Act include, but are not limited to:

- Requires that DHS complete at least one pilot project to determine if a state may enhance their driver's license to meet WHTI standards.
- Exempts US/Canadian children 16 and younger from the WHTI documentary requirements, and encourages flexibility for school groups.
- Sets the cost of the PASS card at \$20 for the first year of issuance in order to encourage early compliance while requiring that card to be received within 10 business days after the State Department has received the application.
- Expands and improves frequent traveler programs for low-risk travelers (NEXUS) and commercial drivers (FAST).

## **BACKGROUND:**

Congress must step-in and direct DHS and State to take the appropriate steps to implement WHTI in as practical way as possible. The PACT ACT will ensure that WHTI secures our borders without unintentionally freezing cross-border tourism and trade.

In September 2006, Congress extended the WHTI land and sea implementation deadline from January 2008 to June 2009. This extension came in part after the Government Accountability Office reported to Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh in May that DHS and State were unlikely to meet the 2008 deadline. Their list of reasons were numerous. DHS did not request nor receive money in the FY 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill to purchase the infrastructure needed to support the PASS card at land ports-of-entry. DHS and State, after over a year and a half of internal discussions, have not chosen the technology for the PASS card. Finally, DHS and State have not completed a cost-benefit analysis as required under Executive Order 12866.

Given the importance of cross-border travel and trade to the economic vitality of both the US and Canada, it is imperative that DHS and State not push forward with an ill-advised WHTI plan. Rep. Slaughter has been the leader in Congress on improving the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), ensuring that the program when implemented will be done so correctly.

#### **Key Provisions of the PACT ACT:**

- Requires that DHS complete at least one pilot project to determine if a state may enhance their driver's license to meet WHTI standards. DHS is prohibited from issuing a Final Rule on

WHTI until the pilot project is complete.

- DHS has agreed to conduct an enhanced driver's license pilot project in Washington state, but they maintain that WHTI will be implemented by January 2008 - long before the pilot project has been completed

- Exempts US/Canadian children 16 and younger from the WHTI documentary requirements, and encourages flexibility for school groups.

- Sets the cost of the PASS card at \$20 for the first year of issuance in order to encourage early compliance. An applicant must receive the card within 10 business days after the State Department has received the application.

- Expands and improves frequent traveler programs for low-risk travelers (NEXUS) and commercial drivers (FAST).

- Requires DHS/State to develop and implement a WHTI public promotion campaign.

- Requires DHS/State to complete a cost-benefit analysis of their final WHTI plan before implementation.

The PACT ACT is supported by the US Chamber of Commerce, the Travel Industry Association, and the Travel Business Roundtable.

For more information on the PACT ACT, please contact Alan Snyder in Rep. Slaughter's office at (202) 225-3615 or Chris Mathey in Rep. McHugh's office at (202) 225-4611.

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